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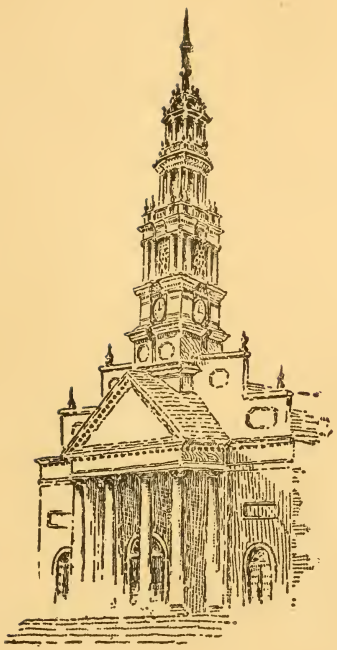

The First Church of Christ
in Hartford

The Meaning of Victory and Peace

A Sermon by the Minister
Thanksgiving Day, 1918

The Meaning of Victory and Peace

A SERMON
PREACHED AT THE
THANKSGIVING SERVICE
OF
THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST
AND
THE SECOND CHURCH OF CHRIST
IN HARTFORD
THANKSGIVING DAY
NOVEMBER 28, 1918

BY
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The Meaning of Victory and Peace

Text:— Psalm CXXVI: 3 — "The Lord hath done great things for us, Whereof we are glad."

We thank God that our Thanksgiving is not one of pride. The victory that has been won was not won by us alone. Here is nothing for frantic boast or for foolish word. Chateau Thierry and St. Mihiel are great names now in the history of the world, thank God. They are radiant names in the history of America. But there are other great names in the history of the world, the Marne and Verdun and Vimy Ridge, names that will shine as long as the world's history is remembered and read, and these names are not written on the pages of American history. I am not one of those who would lament because this is so. I am one of those who would remember that it is so, lest I be foolish and boastful in a day when it behooves me to be humble in my thanksgiving.

A first reason for our Thanksgiving is that no one nation observes it *alone*. Not America. For all that we did, all that we are doing, all that we ever can do, has been

made possible and will be made possible by the service and the sacrifice unto the uttermost of Belgium and France and England and Italy, and that shining roll of the lesser peoples who "resisted even unto blood, striving against sin." Our's it was as a nation to have part in the final victory. But the part we had and have was made possible for us by them. And it is not a time for thanksgiving on the part of France or Italy or Belgium or England alone, nor of all of these together, "for apart from us, they were not made perfect," "God having provided some better thing," a thing which concerned us and involved us in their sacrifice as in their triumph. Therefore it is meet for us in humility to be thankful.

"*Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,*
An humble and a contrite heart."

We are not grateful for peace if by peace we mean, as many who do not think, seem to think we mean, the cessation of strife. The call to cease firing is no blessing save as the purposes of the firing have been attained, save as those purposes were worthy to abide when the firing has ceased. Peace is no negative thing in a world made up of mighty

forces that move on in obedience to the movement of the primal will of God or that move on in disobedience to His eternal laws, *but that in any case move on.* Peace is the issue of that ordering of these forces by which they move in obedience to God's will, and not contrary to it. We are not thankful for a peace which means simply that fighting has ceased.

And we are not thankful for victory. Victory has quite as often been shameful as noble in the history of the wars of this sad old world. Those victories are to be remembered with gratitude which are victories of righteousness and so worthy to abide. Neither the word peace nor the word victory give adequate content for the Christian's psalm of thanksgiving. He is able to sing hymns of praise only as he is assured that his victory is the victory of righteousness, and that the peace promised is the peace of an ordered world wherein the life of man shall move in obedience to the will of God.

To offer worthy thanks for victory then, we must review the motives which led us and our allies to undertake the war, and assure ourselves that it is our triumph in the

serving of those motives, concerning which we give thanks to Almighty God.

We may remember then that the dominant motive which led the nations of the Entente into the world war and still more markedly the dominant motive which led our own nation into the war was *the Christian motive of good will for all men, the Christian motive of love for humanity.* It was a sense of outraged human pledges; in which outrage was involved the brutal subjection of multitudes of men and women, of great hosts of piteous little children and of other hosts of generations yet unborn, that led Belgium through the person of her gallant king, to bare her breast against the sword of the aggressor; that led France, recovering, cleansing and renewing her ancient faith, to give herself obedient to the shining ideals of her noblest past and to the shining hope of her still more glorious future in supremest act of self sacrifice that the future might see the salvation of her integrity, her honor and her very life. It was the appeal of a stricken and outraged humanity that led Britain to answer as one man to the call of war in that big and fateful moment when the cries of

jingoes on the one hand and of little Englanders on the other hand were swallowed up in the crusading cry of England as she answered "God wills it."

In three fearful years of blood and flame other motives that were born out of a past misshapen with iniquity and stained with sin, were consumed as the dross in the flame. And from the chancellories of the allied nations round the whole circuit of Europe's lines of fire and steel, one motive, dominant at the first, became the exclusive motive of the nations allied in the great war. It has been the motive of saving humanity from the despotisms of the far past, and the materialisms of the near past and the fearfully threatening present; to the spiritual ideals which have ever hung over the nations of the world, and which were revealed by the light of battle to be shining clear in heaven's radiance above the contending hosts, beckoning the world into a glorious future.

In such a moment our own nation entered the war, moved by such a clear shining motive, inspired by such a holy ideal. If we give thanks for victory it

is because the victory is the victory of armies contending with this end. Not because men have been killed; not because prisoners have been taken; not because guns have been captured; not because standards have been planted beyond opposing lines of foes; do we give thanks. But because prisoners have been liberated; because death's harvest has been checked, because women and children have been redeemed, because the faint have been lifted and the falling upheld, because the hungry have been fed and the naked clothed; because not only has this ministry been wrought for many who now are living, but also because in this victory, little children and men and women and states and nations now in travail of birth and in generations yet unborn; — because these also have so been served—we give thanks for victory and humbly rejoice that unto us as a people it has been given to have part in so great a deliverance.

We do give thanks for peace, but it is not because peace means cessation of fighting. It is because the peace for which pledges are given, the peace whose light makes glorious the skies in the east where the day is dawn-

ing, is not the peace of an absence of fighting; but is the peace of a concord of peoples, the peace that issues from the will of God, progressively wrought into the structure of the international life, into the fabric of the world. For this is the ultimate motive of this nation and our allies in the world war, a motive involved in the primary motive with which we entered the war, a motive increasingly apparent as we have continued in the war, a motive dominant now as the war comes to its close and issues in the peace that shall be.

From the lips of the far seeing statesmen of every allied land, in so far as their words come to our ears, and supremely from the lips of the two great prophet statesmen — and there but two, these two and no more— whom the war has given to humanity, the President of the United States and the Premier of Great Britain — from these all alike and from these two supremely, comes the voice that is shaping the issues of the war, the issues that are becoming the dynamic issues of the forming peace. From these comes the echo of the great word of Lincoln, spoken in an audience room that seemed

once so vast and that now seems so small, ringing now round the circle of the world, as the third generation after him, having sat at his feet, breathes forth in this new and higher day his spirit for this new and greater world: —"With malice toward none and with charity for all." In this spirit the allied nations accept their coming victory and seek to bind up the wounds, not of a nation, but of a world, with those bonds that shall be healing for the present woe and that shall be life giving for the future welfare of humanity.

We give thanks for a coming peace therefore in the terms of which *the supremacy of truth shall be exalted* and in the continuance of which the supremacy of truth shall have its rightful dominion. Gone are the days of secret diplomacy and intrigue from international relationships, as, please God, gone are the days of subtle deceits in domestic affairs and in business dealings. Come are the days when diplomacy shall mean publicity and truth dealing, for out of deceit come wars following swiftly upon the rumours and threats of war, and out of truth comes peace which is the work of righteousness forever.

We thank God for a coming peace in which *righteousness shall be exalted* in the very terms thereof, and in which righteousness shall be the safeguard of its continuance to us and to our children. Gone are the days of iniquities based upon force and the threats of force, of armies and armaments to be used as pawns in the devil's game of bullying and swashbuckling through the properties of the world on the theory that might makes right, that he may take who has the power, that he may keep who can. Come are the days when righteousness makes the strength of a nation in the affairs of international relationships, as we trust the days are come when righteousness makes the success and marks the career of men in domestic affairs, in commercial and industrial relationships.

We thank God for a peace which *exalts and holds sacred the worth of the individual*, a peace that assures this by the terms in which it is to be written, and that is to be guarded for our children and our children's children by this sacred talisman written upon its parchments and realized in its life. Gone are the days of the kings and the princes,

the earthly potentates that strut their little day upon the stage of the world's life and obsess the minds of men with their vaunted prerogatives and their unholy privileges. Come are the days of the plain man, of human worth, when a peasant's tears shall be as precious as ever were those of a queen, and the cry of the babe in the tenement as tenderly heard by the common life, as the sob of the prince in his chamber in the palace. Come are the days when courts and constitutions, when ambassadors and sovereignties shall discern the truth of the plowboy's vision that "a man's a man for a' that," when small nations shall have their rights and the little man shall have his chance, when the weak peoples shall not perish because of their weakness, nor the weak folk find their weakness their destruction. Much more is involved in this than the self-direction of Belgium or Serbia, of Poland and Finland. But He whose right it is will turn and overturn until the world's life, as realized among the nations, and man's life, as realized within every nation, shall answer to this string of gold.

We give God thanks for *a peace of active*

brotherhood, a brotherhood that shall be recognized as its ideal in the terms in which the peace is proclaimed and that shall be continuously and progressively realized and so become the only safe assurance that the peace shall abide beyond the moments in which it is signed. Gone are the days when the law of competition ruled unchecked among the nations, for that way, we now know, lies chaos and the dark. Come are the days when the watchword of the nations shall be "*Together*" as we trust the watchword of the political, the social, the commercial and the industrial life of the several peoples within their sovereignties, their states, their cities and their communities, shall be "*Together*." Gone are the days of ruinous rivalries in the making of armaments, in the building of forts and battleships, in the conscripting and furnishing of soldiers. Come are the days of nobler rivalries, the rivalries of mind and hand serving the commonwealth in obedience to a heart that pulses with good will. Thank God no one nation did win the war alone. It could not be won until it was won *together*. If we are wise enough to discern it, this is our

lesson written in fire and blood, written in sorrow and woe in letters both red and black; that the Kingdom of God cannot be won until it is won *together*. For this we give God thanks.

If these be the things which victory and peace mean for us we do well to give thanks. If not, we might well give ourselves to a day of fasting, of penitence, of prayer. Now since these are the things which by the grace of God the heart of the world is determined that victory and peace shall mean, therefore let us keep the feast and not with the old leaven. Let us sing the song, the new song. Let us fall upon our knees with full hearts as we thank God that He has given our eyes to behold the light of this Thanksgiving Day.

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